

## COLONIAL BLACKTOWN'S INSPIRATIONAL 'FIRSTS'

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The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a number of remarkable developments in British–Aboriginal relationships in the fledgling colony of New South Wales. Many ‘firsts’ originated with Bolongaia, the Aboriginal girl now better known as ‘Maria Lock’. Academically astute and mature beyond her years, she proved highly adept at navigating white European society—although through assimilation and not on her own terms. In 1824 Maria married the illiterate convict carpenter Robert Lock, thus realising the colony’s first official interracial marriage. She was granted supervision over her husband’s affairs for the remainder of his sentence and eventually received his land grants, as well as her own. In fact, Maria Lock successfully pursued the first native title claim in Australian history. Yet, a number of stubborn myths about her life and achievements persist in popular accounts. Meanwhile, Robert Lock’s background remains almost entirely unknown. This article aims at rectifying these unfortunate aspects of one of the most remarkable intercultural unions in the early colony.

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### A BRIGHT INDIGENOUS STUDENT

#### *At the top of her class*

Still a teenager yet of a sophistication that defied her young age, on 17 April 1819 one of Blacktown’s most illustrious Aboriginal community members emerged into the public eye. At the time, nothing suggested that a brief report at the bottom of page 2 of the *Sydney Gazette* was anything but business as usual. However, that dry bulletin, casually reporting on the impressive academic ability of a young Aboriginal student, marked the onset of a life of truly ground-breaking achievements:

On Tuesday last [13 April 1819] an Anniversary School [New South Wales State] Examination took place at Parramatta, at which the children of the Native Institution were introduced, their numbers not exceeding twenty; those of the schools of the children of Europeans amounting nearly to a hundred. Prizes were prepared for distribution among such of the children as should be found to excel in the early rudiments of education, moral and religious; and it is not less strange than pleasing to remark, in answer to an erroneous opinion which had long prevailed with many, namely, that the Aborigines of this country were insusceptible to any mental improvement which could adapt them to the purposes of civilised association, that a black girl of fourteen years of age, between three and four years in the school, bore away the chief prize, with much satisfaction to their worthy adjudgers and auditors.<sup>1</sup>

Although the piece does not identify her explicitly, it is now commonly assumed—and supported by oral records<sup>2</sup>—that the ‘black girl of fourteen years of age’ was Bolongaia, the Darkinjung (Darkinyung) girl who became a household name as ‘Maria Lock’.<sup>3</sup> She may have been named after Governor Philip Gidley King’s (1758–1808)<sup>4</sup> daughter, Anna Maria (1793–1852),<sup>5</sup> who was known to her friends and family as ‘Maria’.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 17 April 1819. ‘Sydney’. P. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Tobin, C., 2001. *The Dharug Story – Our Local History. An Aboriginal History of Western Sydney from 1788*. [http://www.geocities.ws/darug\\_allowan/story.html](http://www.geocities.ws/darug_allowan/story.html) [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>3</sup> Although it has been suggested that this bright Aboriginal girl could also have been Betty Cox, Maria Lock’s academic achievements had been specifically called out by her teachers; Liverpool City Council, 17 June 2021. *Liverpool City Council launches refreshed Maria Lock memorial*. Press release. <https://www.councilnews.com.au/2021/06/16139355-liverpool-city-council-launches-refreshed-maria-lock-memorial> [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>4</sup> Governed 1800–1806.

<sup>5</sup> Ford, G.E., 2010. *Darkiñung Recognition. An Analysis of the Historiography for the Aborigines from the Hawkesbury–Hunter Ranges to the Northwest of Sydney*. MA Thesis, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, University of Sydney. P. 74.

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*Names of the Children of the Aborigines received into the Native Institution Parramatta, since its foundation, 10 Jan<sup>y</sup>. 1814.*

N <sup>o</sup>	Date of Admission.	Names.	supposed Ages.	State of learning.	not now in School.
1	28 Dec. 1814	Maria	13	Spells four syllables & reads	
2	"	Kitty	12	reads & Writes well.	
3	"	Fanny	9	beginning to read & spell	
4	"	Friday	12	reads & Writes well.	
5	10 Jan <sup>y</sup> 1815	Billy	12	d <sup>o</sup> d <sup>o</sup>	
6	6 June 1816	Halour			Abandoned
7	"	Doors			d <sup>o</sup>
8	12 Aug <sup>t</sup> "	Betty Cox	15	reads & Writes well	
9	"	Mibah	15	improves in read <sup>g</sup> & spelling	
10	"	Betty Fulton	16	reads & Writes well.	
11	"	Tommy	11	reads & Writes well.	
12	"	Peter			Abandoned
13	"	Pendergrass			d <sup>o</sup>
14	23 "	Amy	8	reads & Spells well.	
15	"	Nancy	10	beginning to read & spell	
16	"	Charlotte			Died in Sydney.
17	9 Sep. 1816	John	6	reads & spells	
18	28 Dec "	Davis			Abandoned.
19	"	Dicky	9	reads & spells well	
20	"	Judith	13	reads & writes well	
21	1 Jan <sup>y</sup> 1818	Jenny Mulgaway	7	reads & spells	
22	"	Joe Marlow			Abandoned.
23	17 July 1818	Reddy	6	reads & spells.	
24	25 Sep "	Wallis	10	repeats the Alphabet	
25	15 Jan <sup>y</sup> 1819	Jemmy	4	d <sup>o</sup>	
26	1 March "	Henry	4	d <sup>o</sup>	
27	20 Dec "	Maria, also Margt	11	d <sup>o</sup>	
28	"	Ranny			taken by her Father?
29	"	Lukey			Died in Parramatta
30	30 May 1820	Joseph	3	d <sup>o</sup>	
31	"	Billy George			taken by his Father.
32	6 June "	Polly	16	reads & Writes well.	
33	28 Dec "	Martha	10	repeats the Alphabet	
34	"	Peggy	8	d <sup>o</sup>	
35	"	Charlotte	10	d <sup>o</sup>	
36	"	Caroline	7	d <sup>o</sup>	
37	"	Anna	1	d <sup>o</sup>	(Signed) Richard Hill Secretary.

**'Names of the Children of the Aborigines received into the Native Institution Parramatta, since its foundation, 10 January 1814.' (Public domain.)**

In 1821, Maria Lock's name topped the official *Admission List of Aborigines* attending Governor Lachlan Macquarie's (1762–1824)<sup>6</sup> experimental school, the Native Institution at Parramatta.<sup>7</sup> The residential institution was located in the area bounded by present-day Macquarie, Marsden and Hunter Streets. It was established to "... civilise, Christianise and educate ..." Aboriginal children, train them in Western customs and equip them to undertake domestic duties.<sup>8,9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Governed 1810–1821.

<sup>7</sup> *List of Pupils at the Native Institution*. Bonwick Transcripts 50. Vol. 127. P. 480. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>8</sup> Christie, M., 1994. Educating Bungelene: A Case of Educational Colonialism. *History of Educational Review*, 23, 2–46.

Below the heading 'State of Learning', next to Maria's name a note reads, "Spells four Syllables in the Bible & reads". Other notes imply that the educational achievements of her classmates were not generally as advanced. Separately, and also in 1821, a 'Very Young Sunday School Teacher' at Parramatta noted that many of the young Aboriginal children "... attend the Sunday School and make a [sic] very rapid progress. ... At the examination last year [13 April 1819], one of the little black girls obtained the best prize as the reward of her industry."<sup>10</sup>

Bolongaia, alias Maria Lock, quickly became an Aboriginal trailblazer. At a time when few Aboriginal children engaged with the colonial government's rudimentary education system, and when even fewer Indigenous girls were enrolled (whether or not voluntarily), Maria was a notable exception. Still more unusual, her academic success was based purely on her acquisition of Western knowledge and values. She proved capable of expertly navigating, living and performing as an equal in white European society,<sup>11</sup> yet without renouncing her familial bonds or her Aboriginality.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Bolongaia's background***

Still, despite her well-deserved recognition, a number of stubborn myths persist. One of those is the continuing confusion about her date of birth. Her death certificate states that she was born in 1794.<sup>13</sup> However, many popular accounts imply that she was born much later. A recent scholarly re-analysis of Maria's life based on primary historical records suggests that she was likely born in 1806 or 1808.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the New South Wales census of 1828 acts as a useful benchmark. It allows us to conclude that she was most likely born in 1808, since that would mean that she was about six years old when she was first enrolled in the Parramatta Native Institution.<sup>15</sup>

Bolongaia was born into the Boorooberongal clan of the Dharug people<sup>16</sup> on the eastern floodplains of the Dyarrubbin—the Hawkesbury River—in what is now Richmond Bottoms. Popular accounts often identify her father as 'Yarramundi', an Aboriginal elder and 'Kuradji' ('Karraj')—Chief or healer—of the Richmond (Hill) Tribes.<sup>17</sup> However, his identity remains beyond our reach. The historical record includes just a single reference, from 1804, to one 'Yaramandy'. That particular Aboriginal elder is now generally thought to have been 'Yellomundy' (Yellomundee) from the Dakal (Portland Head Rock) area,<sup>18</sup> a locality in present-day Ebenezer.

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<sup>9</sup> Cruickshank, J., 2008. To exercise a beneficial influence over a man: Marriage, gender and the native institutions in early colonial Australia. In: *Evangelists of Empire? Missionaries in Colonial History*. eScholarship Research Centre, in collaboration with the School of Historical Studies, Melbourne. Pp. 115–124.

<sup>10</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 17 April 1819. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, A16771. Hassall Correspondence, 2, 369–371. Letter from a 'Very Young Sunday School Teacher', Parramatta, to Sunday School Magazine at Oxford.

<sup>11</sup> The Rev. Richard Hill (1782–1836), secretary of the Native Institution at the time of Maria's marriage to Robert Lock, in 1824, wrote that she "... has proved that the instructions she received was (sic) not lost from her." (State Archives of New South Wales. NRS 907, 2/7908, reel 1153. P. 3.)

<sup>12</sup> Locke, M.L., 2018. Wirrawi Bubuwul – Aboriginal Women Strong. *Australian Journal of Education*, 62, 299–310.

<sup>13</sup> Brook, J., and Kohen, J.L., 1991. *The Parramatta Native Institute and the Black Town*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press. P. 250.

<sup>14</sup> Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* Pp. 68, 250.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* P. 143.

<sup>16</sup> Her family group is known as 'The Branch' natives of the Hawkesbury–Hunter Ranges; Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 73.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Phillip (1738–1814), the first Governor of New South Wales (governed 1788–1792), had given the area the name 'Richmond Hill' in 1789.

<sup>18</sup> Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 142.

This common misidentification may have been of Maria's own doing. In her 1831 legal claim to a land grant, she referred to herself as daughter of 'the Chief of the Richmond Tribes':

— That on the first establishment of the [Parramatta] Native Institution by His Excellency Governor Macquarie, your Petitioner, then a Child, was placed there by her father *the Chief of the Richmond Tribes*.<sup>19</sup> (my emphasis).

In 2004, Justice Rodney Neville Madgwick (retired 2008) of the Federal Court of Australia unwittingly perpetuated the myth, based on Court exhibits, in an attempt at clarifying parliamentary law:

Maria Lock is claimed to be (and on balance, appears to have been) Yarramundi's daughter whether biological [or] only informal but effective [through] adoption.<sup>20</sup>



**The Rev. Robert Hassall.**  
(Courtesy: University of Sydney.  
Out of copyright.)

Justice Madgwick's ruling reveals an important insight, namely, that Yellomundy may not have been Bolongaia's biological father but merely her 'social' elder. In fact, he may have been her grandfather on her mother's side.<sup>21</sup>

Bolongaia herself is thought to have been the child of an Aboriginal mother and the son of a white settler, possibly Edward Luttrell (1786–1811).<sup>22,23</sup> A formal coronial statement made in April 1888 following the death of Maria's daughter, Mary Ann (born 1830), recorded that, before her marriage to Robert Lock, Maria had been 'Maria Lutteral'.<sup>24</sup> If true, that may also explain why a relatively light-skinned Bolongaia was placed in the care of Anne Hassall (1794–1885), wife of the Rev. Thomas Hassall (1794–1868), from a young age—that is, from a time well before she was enrolled in the Parramatta Native Institution.

### ***The Parramatta Native Institution***

Another persistent myth regarding Maria's early life has taken hold of the popular consciousness. It is often said that on 28 December 1814, possibly as a tribute to the authorities and hopeful of their protection from aggressive colonists, Yellomundy enrolled Bolongaia—under her anglicised name 'Maria'—as the first Aboriginal student in the Parramatta Native Institution. However, Maria had already been enrolled at the Native Institution since early December 1814, well before

<sup>19</sup> Lock, M., 1831. *Correspondence from Maria Lock to Governor Darling*, dated 3 March 1831, received 14 March 1831. Colonial Secretary item 31/1853. State Archives of New South Wales.

<sup>20</sup> Madgwick, R.N., 31 March 2004. *Gale versus Minister for Land (etc.) for New South Wales [2004]*. Federal Court of Australia 374. Para. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* Pp. 141–142.

<sup>22</sup> Purnell, M., n.d. *Edward Luttrell, 1786–1811 (aged 25 years)*. Australian Royalty.

<https://australianroyalty.net.au/tree/purnellmccord.ged/individual/I14368/Edward-Luttrell> [accessed 25 April 2022].

<sup>23</sup> Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 141, note 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



Yellomundy's meeting with Governor Macquarie on 28 December.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that Maria herself is the source of most of the confusion. As we saw already, in her petition for a land grant, she claimed that she "... was placed there by her father ..."<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, her stellar academic performance quickly made her the talk of the town. The historical record becomes rather opaque in the early 1820s, however. On the one hand, it is often thought that by 1822 Maria was living with the Hassalls in their household at Parramatta, where she was 'maternally treated' by Anne Hassall and employed as a domestic worker. On the other hand, her later petition for a land grant implies that she remained at the Native Institution until she married Robert Lock in 1824. To reconcile this apparent conflict, it is possible that Maria may have been a day student at the Native Institution while boarding at the Hassall residence.

By late 1822, just 14 years old, Maria reportedly married 'Dicky' (born 1803), a former fellow student from the Native Institution. Among white working-class girls, it was common to conclude one's education and join the workforce around Maria's age, so her marriage at just fourteen was nothing out of the ordinary. Dicky, son of Boorong of the Richmond clan (died ca. 1813) and the well-known Wangal elder Woollarawarre Bennelong (ca. 1764–1813), had meanwhile moved to the household of the Wesleyan (Methodist) missionary William Walker (1800–1855).

Walker convinced Dicky that he could potentially go to heaven upon his death. With 'heaven' presumably portrayed as a highly desirable destination, Dicky agreed to be baptised as Thomas Walker Coke (pronounced 'cook'), after John Wesley's successor, the Methodist bishop Thomas Coke (1747–1814). It is possible

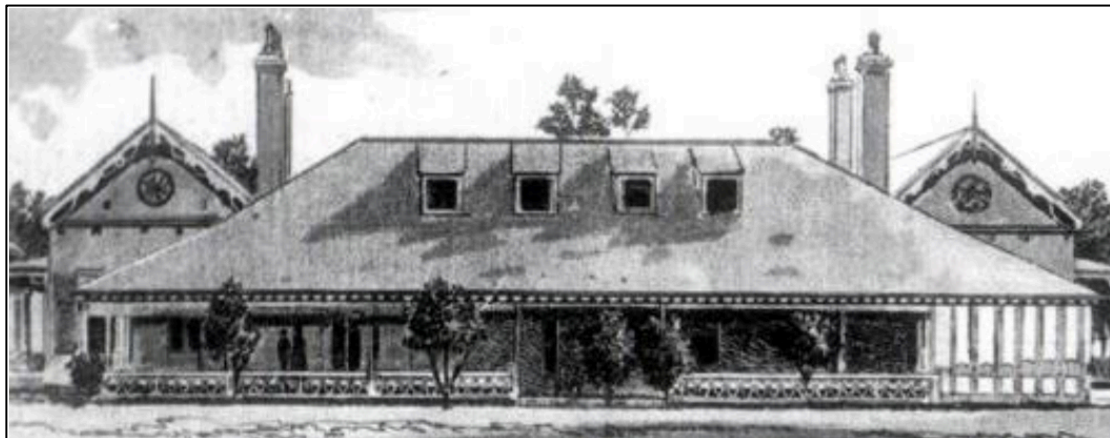


***Flannel Flowers*, monumental sculpture established on the former Black Town Native Institution's site in 2018. (Author supplied.)**

<sup>25</sup> Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.* Pp. 67, 250.

<sup>26</sup> Lock, 1831. *Op. cit.*

that Dicky readily agreed to his baptism because of the missionary work the Rev. Richard Johnson (ca. 1756–1827) and his wife Mary (1753–1831) had previously done with his mother.<sup>27</sup>



**(Top) Black Town Native Institution. (Bottom) Former Black Town Native Institution, ca. 1900, at the time known as 'Lloydhurst'. (Blacktown City Libraries. CC BY-SA-NC 3.0 NZ.)**

Maria thus became known as Maria 'Cook', which was sometimes misinterpreted as 'Maria the cook'. In turn, this gave rise to the myth that she was employed in Governor Macquarie's kitchen.<sup>28</sup> Dicky fell ill and died a few weeks into their marriage, aged 19. He was buried on 1 February 1823 at St. John's Church of England in Parramatta.

<sup>27</sup> Middleton, M., 2019. *Women Pioneers of Australia. Anniversary of the first Christian Service on Australian Soil*. Australian Christian Research Institute. <http://www.chr.org.au/documents/Pioneer-women.docx> [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>28</sup> The myth passed down in the family is that she worked in Governor King's kitchen, but that is physically impossible, given that this would have been before her birth; Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 74.



The Native Institution had meanwhile been relocated, on Governor Thomas Brisbane's (1773–1860)<sup>29</sup> orders, from Parramatta to what is now the corner of Richmond Road and Rooty Hill Road North in Blacktown.<sup>30</sup> By the time of Dicky's death, Maria was already in residence at the new Black Town Native Institution. Planning for the new residential school had seen a number of convicts assigned to undertake building works, including the father-and-son team of carpenters, Jonathan and Robert Lock.

Robert Lock, in his early twenties, would likely have noticed Maria among the Aboriginal students. She was lighter-skinned and clearly more sophisticated and mature than the other female Aboriginal students, both in how she carried herself and in her conversation. Maria, in turn, may have had her interest piqued by Robert's striking physical appearance. Reportedly,<sup>31</sup> 5 feet 6½ inch (1.69 metre)-tall Robert had a fair, blushed and bright complexion, blue eyes and sandy red hair.<sup>32,33</sup>



**St. John's Cathedral Church in Parramatta, built in 1803. (Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.)**

Whatever may have happened to cement their relationship, following Dicky's death Maria was not immediately matched with another 'suitable' Aboriginal spouse. And so, on 26 January 1824, 15 or 16-year-old Maria and 24-year-old Robert—"... an honest and laborious man..." in William Walker's assessment<sup>34</sup>—were married at St. John's Church of England in Parramatta, the same place where Maria had laid to

<sup>29</sup> Governed 1821–1825.

<sup>30</sup> A monumental sculpture, *Flannel Flowers*, was inaugurated on the former Native Institution's site in 2018. See: Johnson, P., 2019. *Sharyn Egan, Flannel Flowers, 2018*. Blacktown Native Institution Project 2018. Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/c3west/blacktown-native-institution-project-2018/sharyn-egan-flannel-flowers-2018/> [accessed 7 May 2022].

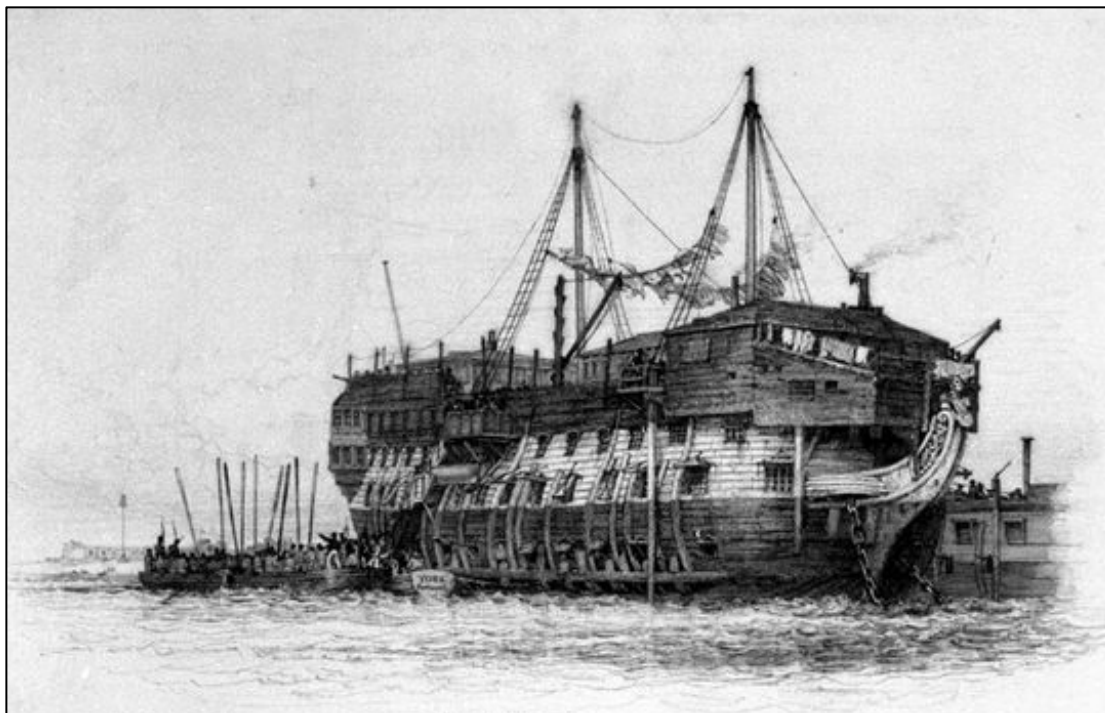
<sup>31</sup> Indent of the *Grenada*. State Archives of New South Wales. Reel 395.

<sup>32</sup> Brook, J., 2008. Lock, Maria. *The Dictionary of Sydney*. [https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/lock\\_maria](https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/lock_maria) [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>33</sup> Derhemi, E., 2020. Interview: Jacinta of the Darug songs. *OGMIOS (Foundation for Endangered Languages) Newsletter*, 66, 5–6. [http://www.ogmios.org/ogmios/Ogmios\\_066.pdf](http://www.ogmios.org/ogmios/Ogmios_066.pdf) [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>34</sup> Walker, W., 1825. *Of the Native Institution. Memorial for land at Eastern Creek in lieu of land held at the Native Institution*. Colonial Secretary's Correspondence, dated 25 November 1825. Item 4/1843A, File No. 477, P. 142.

rest her late first husband not even a year hence. Yet, whereas Maria's achievements have become fairly well-known, little is known about her husband Robert.



**Prison hulk H.M.S. York in Portsmouth; sketch by Edward William Cooke (1811–1880).  
(National Maritime Museum via Wikipedia. Public domain.)**

## PRELUDE TO A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

Robert Lock (sometimes spelt Locke), an illiterate carpenter from Norfolk (England), arrived in New South Wales on 16 September 1821, aged 21, on the convict transport *Grenada*.<sup>35</sup> Among the 151 other convicts<sup>36</sup> on board was his father, Jonathan (56). Both had been convicted to seven years of transportation at the Norfolk Quarter Sessions Court on 10 January 1821, charged with “grand larceny”.<sup>37</sup> Quarter Sessions were local courts that heard less serious cases, in essence any crime that did not usually carry a death sentence or life imprisonment. More serious cases were heard by the Courts of Assize.<sup>38</sup>

The *Norfolk Chronicle* of 20 January 1821 detailed their crimes:

Jonathan Lock was convicted stealing, on Dec. last, three geese, the property of John Smith, of Larling, farmer. The prisoner was further convicted, jointly with his son, Robert Lock, of having stolen, on the 31st of December last, a pig, belonging to Mary Ann Towler, Rockland All Saints. And the said Robert Lock was also further convicted [of] stealing three pianos, from William Cooking of Great Effingham, the 1st of March last. The Jury recommended Robert Lock to mercy, which the Court intimated they could not listen to, in consequence of his being

<sup>35</sup> Willetts, J., n.d. *Free Settler or Felon. Convict ship Grenada 1821*.

[https://www.freesettlororfelon.com/convict\\_ship\\_grenada\\_1821.htm](https://www.freesettlororfelon.com/convict_ship_grenada_1821.htm) and

[https://www.freesettlororfelon.com/convict\\_ship\\_sesostris\\_1826.htm](https://www.freesettlororfelon.com/convict_ship_sesostris_1826.htm) [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>36</sup> <https://convictrecords.com.au/ships/grenada/1821> [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>37</sup> *Norwich Mercury*, 1821. Cited by Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.* P. 253.

<sup>38</sup> In 1972, the Crown Court of England and Wales replaced the Quarter Sessions and Assize Courts.





Sir,–

Conceiving that we should be guilty of the greatest ingratitude were we not to make you acquainted with the treatment we have experienced during our voyage, under the jurisdiction of Mr. Cunningham, whose behaviour to us has been such as to merit our grateful acknowledgments, and whose constant endeavours have been such as to render us every comfort and indulgence, more than men in our situation could have expected. And we hope in our general conduct it will be found that those indulgencies, which we have experienced from that Gentleman's humanity, have not altogether been vainly bestowed upon us, for every man is fully sensible of the lenient treatment he has experienced. We are likewise indebted to the Captain and Officers of the ship, whose behaviour to us has been such as to assist in the liberty we have experienced during our voyage. These are our general sentiments, which proceed from pure motives of gratitude, and which we humbly present to you for your perusal.<sup>42</sup>

Little is known about Robert Lock's childhood or teenage years. Born in Larling, Norfolk, he was baptised on 15 July 1800 at Great Yarmouth. His parents, Jonathan and Sarah Lock née Elmer, had to feed a large family, including Robert's siblings John, James, Ann Maria, Carinda, Thomas Arthur and nine other children.<sup>43</sup>

Of those who had arrived on the *Grenada*, 41 were sent up the river to Parramatta, 26 of whom—including the Locks—were immediately dispatched to Liverpool.<sup>44</sup> Given the desperate skills' shortage in the young colony, father and son Lock were promptly put to work on the construction of the new Black Town Native Institution and its outbuildings, where Robert eventually met Maria.

## COLONIAL FIRSTS

### *Marriage vows and stipulations*

And so, on the thirty-sixth anniversary of the establishment of the British colony at Sydney Cove, a solemn wedding ceremony was held in Parramatta. The official marriage register includes a record of a 'Maria Cook'. Despite the subdued ceremony, the event represented a momentous occasion in Australian colonial history, as this was the first officially sanctioned interracial marriage in New South Wales.<sup>45</sup> Once again, Maria was at the centre of a societal 'first'. As we will see over and over again, Maria was a truly remarkable woman who transcended and overturned social conventions, meanwhile shredding long-standing cultural rule-books.

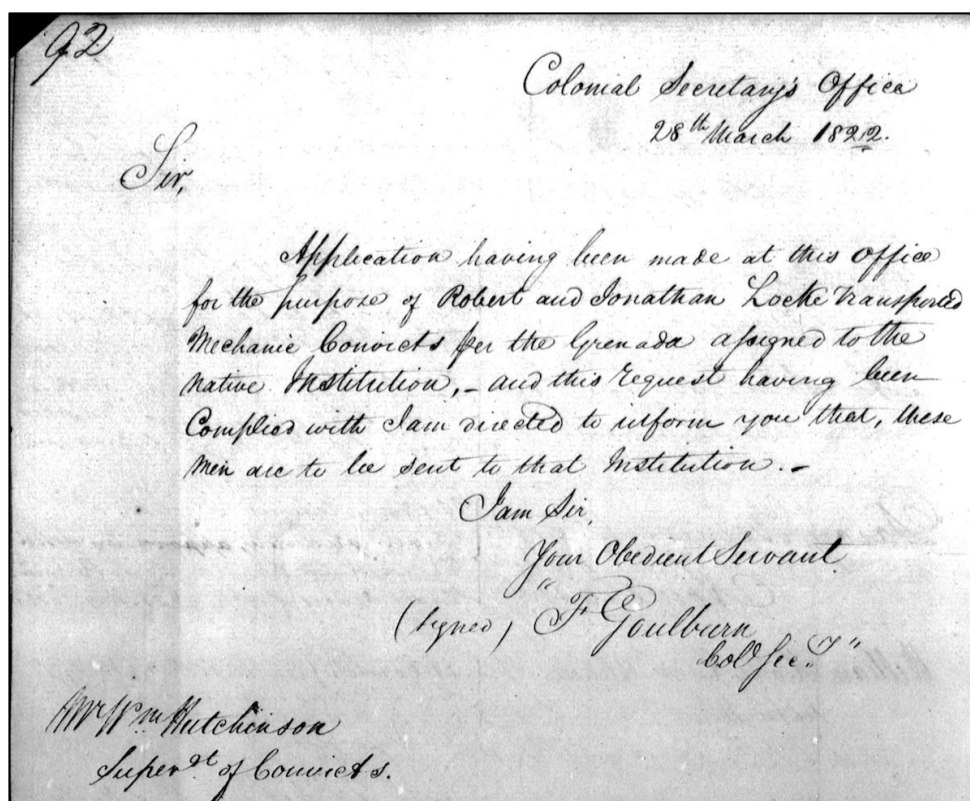
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<sup>42</sup> *Sydney Gazette* (and *New South Wales Advertiser*), 22 September 1821. Sydney. Ship news. P. 2.

<sup>43</sup> On 6 December 1824, his (half) brother John Lock(e) (born 1791), a farm labourer aged 30, was also convicted to seven years of transportation, in his case for having stolen a horse. Although John was initially sentenced to death, upon production of a letter stating that "England was no good for him and that he be sent to the New South Wales colony", the Essex Quarter Sessions Court showed leniency. He departed Portsmouth on 30 November 1825 on the convict transport *Sesostris*, arriving in Sydney on 21 March 1826. It is unclear whether Robert or his father were aware of John's conviction and subsequent transportation to New South Wales. See: Lock, K., 2009. *Re: Lock/e Larling*. <https://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/lock/762/> [accessed 14 April 2022].

<sup>44</sup> Willetts, n.d. *Op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> The British penal colony of New South Wales encompassed the area of present-day Australia east of the 135° East meridian, a North–South line bisecting the continent about 20 km east of the South Australian town of Coober Pedy and some 115 km east of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. Arthur Phillip's instructions of 25 April 1787, to proclaim the colony for Great Britain, also included "... all the islands adjacent in the Pacific Ocean ..." between latitudes 10°37' South—Cape York in far north Queensland—and 43°39' South, the latitude of South East Cape, the southernmost point of the Tasmanian mainland. (King, R.J., 1998. *Terra Australis*, New Holland and New South Wales: the Treaty of Tordesillas and Australia. *The Globe*, 47, 35–55; Coltheart, L., and the Museum of Australian Democracy, 2011. *Governor Phillip's Instructions 25 April 1787 (GB)*. In: *Australia's Story: Documenting a Democracy*. <https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item-sdid-68.html>; accessed 17 October 2020.)



**'Re: assignment to the Native Institution.'**  
**(Colonial Secretary item 4/3505, p. 92. State Archives of New South Wales.)**

But the official endorsement of this British–Aboriginal marriage was not the only colonial ‘first’ that day. Since Robert had four years of his seven-year sentence yet to serve, the colonial government formally assigned him to his wife’s supervision and care—to the extent that Maria was even entitled to return him as unsuitable or unwanted should she be dissatisfied with his performance.<sup>46</sup> Those conditions were likely unique in the history of the convict era,<sup>47,48</sup> they certainly represented another ‘first’ in New South Wales.

Following their wedding ceremony, the couple returned to the ‘Black Town’. They commenced married life in a rustic wooden farmhouse, one of the small farms allotted to Aboriginal couples, on a small, four-acre (1.6 hectares) parcel of land adjacent to the newly relocated Native Institution.<sup>49</sup> By late 1825, it was rumoured that the Church would appropriate their small block of land, which prompted Robert to seek assistance in applying for a grant of his own there, “... on Eastern Creek ...”<sup>50</sup> But alas, no more public land was available at that location.<sup>51</sup>

Shortly afterwards, Robert was employed by the Rev. Robert Cartwright (1771–1856), minister of St. Luke’s Church of England in Liverpool. The Locks moved to a farm owned by Cartwright at Cabramatta Creek, where Robert built a house for their own use. While there, Maria briefly identified herself as ‘Mary’, calling

<sup>46</sup> Shelley, C., n.d. *Locke Surname. Meaning, History & Origin*. <https://selectsurnames.com/locke/> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>47</sup> Tobin, 2001. *Op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> Brook, 2008. *Op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 228.

<sup>51</sup> In 1826 the Church used the previous Black Town Native Institution land grant for a white boarding school; *Ibid.*



**The Reverend Robert Cartwright (1771–1856). Artist unknown. (Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. Call number ML30, reference 447226. Out of copyright.)**

the family home ‘Maryvale’,<sup>52,53,54</sup> presumably to fit in better with the white society she had become associated with. This further assimilation may have been relatively short-lived, however, as she appears to have reverted to ‘Maria’ and a greater focus on her ancestral Aboriginal culture and customs once her first son, Robert Joseph Lock, was born in 1829.<sup>55</sup>

Having married a white European—irrespective of his status, initially free or former convict—Maria was entitled to “... a small Grant of Land and a Cow as a Marriage Portion”.<sup>56</sup> Given Robert’s convict status, she was granted a parcel of land in her own right. This was yet another colonial ‘first’ for an Aboriginal woman.<sup>57</sup> However, although she received the cow shortly after her wedding day, it took many years and extensive petitioning before Maria eventually received the 40 acres (16.2 hectares) of land she had been promised by Governor Macquarie.

### **Land grant struggles**

According to the 1828 New South Wales census, Robert had become a timber worker at Liverpool. His sentence had meanwhile expired, and so he successfully applied for, paid the relevant fee and received his Certificate of Freedom on 28 April 1828. However, by 1831, six years after their marriage and now with two young children in tow,<sup>58</sup> Maria had not yet been allocated the promised land grant.

And so she did something no Aboriginal person had done before her. A truly formidable political force, she decided to hold the Crown to account and persuasively petitioned Governor Ralph Darling (1772–1858).<sup>59</sup> She claimed ownership of the land grant opposite the Native Institution, which Governor Macquarie had awarded to her late brother,<sup>60</sup> Colebee (Coley, Coleby, Coalbee).

<sup>52</sup> Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.* P. 227.

<sup>53</sup> Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 149, note 42.

<sup>54</sup> Note that in the 1833 grant to Robert Lock, the family home in Liverpool was referred to as ‘Glenburn’; Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.* P. 256; Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 149, note 42.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Brook, 2008. *Op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> Women settlers and emancipists (former convicts) were entitled to receive land grants, but this occurred infrequently. Some of the first land grants to women were made to Ellen Frazer (ca. 1764–1870) in February 1794 and to Ann Robinson on 22 August 1794. See: People Australia, 2012–2022. *Fraser, Ellen (c. 1764–1840)*. National Centre of Biography, Australian National University.

<https://peopleaustralia.anu.edu.au/biography/fraser-ellen-31029/text38398> [accessed 18 April 2022]; NSW Land and Property Information, 2013. *History of Land and Property Information*. ISSN 2201-1978.

<sup>58</sup> Robert and Maria’s marriage led to 10 children, nine of whom survived to adulthood: John (1825), Harriet (1827–1829), Robert Joseph (1829), Mary Ann (1830), William (1834), Charles William Leslie (1840), Clara Sarah (1842), Eliza Henrietta (1842), Martha (1842) and James (1845). See <https://australianroyalty.net.au/tree/purnellmccord.ged/family/F19885/Robert-Lock-Maria> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>59</sup> Governed 1825–1831.

<sup>60</sup> Colebee (born ca. 1787) was significantly older than Maria, and so he was more likely her ‘social’ brother than a direct sibling, in the sense that they formed part of the same family group; Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 144.



**CERTIFICATE OF FREEDOM.**

No. *28/389*  
Date, *28 April 1828*

Prisoner's No. —  
Name, — *Robert Lock*  
Ship, — *Grenada Co.*  
Master, — *Donato*  
Year, — *1821*  
Native Place, —  
Trade or Calling —  
Offence, —  
Place of Trial, — *Norfolk Is.*  
Date of Trial, — *10th January 1821*  
Sentence, — *Seven years*  
Year of Birth, —  
Height, —  
Complexion, —  
Hair, —  
Eyes, —  
General Remarks —

**Robert Lock's Certificate of Freedom, 28 April 1828. (State Archives of New South Wales.)**

In 1816, Colebee and Nurragingy, Chief of the South Creek clan, had served as guides of a punitive yet unsuccessful expedition across the Blue Mountains led by William Cox (1764–1837), magistrate at the Hawkesbury. In recognition of their services, they had been given a small land grant of 30 acres (12.1 hectares).<sup>61,62</sup>

On this occasion I invested Nurragingy, alias Creek Jemmy, with my Order of Merit by presenting him with a handsome Brass Corset or Breast Plate, having his name inscribed thereon in full – as chief of the South Creek Tribe. I also promised him and his friend Colebee a

<sup>61</sup> Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Brook, 2008. *Op. cit.*

grant of 30 acres of land on the South Creek between them as an additional reward for their fidelity to Government and their recent good conduct.<sup>63</sup>

It was the first land grant given to Aboriginal people under colonial rule. A deed formally confirming the grant was eventually drawn up in 1819, although just in Colebee's name. Located alongside Richmond Road, in the present-day Blacktown suburbs of Oakhurst and Colebee, the area of the grant became known as the 'Black Town'.

Maria's petition, written in a beautiful, flowing cursive hand,<sup>64,65</sup> is powerful, factual and direct.<sup>66</sup>

To His Excellency Lieut. General Darling, Governor in Chief, etc. etc. of New South Wales and its Dependencies.

The Petition of Maria Lock, an Aboriginal Native of New South Wales.

Humbly Sheweth, Rob<sup>t</sup>. and Mary Lock,

— That on the first establishment of the Native Institution by His Excellency Governor Macquarie, your petitioner, then a Child, was placed there by her father, the Chief of the Richmond Tribes.

— That Petitioner continued in the School till she was married to Robert Lock, with whom she has ever since lived, and by whom she has had two Children.

— That at the time they were married your Petitioner was promised a small Grant of Land, and a Cow as a Marriage Portion.

— That she has since received the Cow, which has increased to five head, but has never received any Land.

— That Governor Macquarie gave her brother Coley a small Grant of Land at Black Town, and as her brother is now dead, your Petitioner humbly prays that this Grant may be transferred to her, and her Children, or that a small portion of the land adjoining may be given to her, whereby she and her husband may be enabled to feed their Cattle, now Seven in number, earn an honest livelihood, and provide a comfortable home for themselves, and their increasing family.

And Your Petitioner shall, as in duty bound, ever pray etc. etc. etc.  
Maria Lock

Liverpool March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1831

Support for Maria's land claim has been added in another hand.<sup>67</sup> The author, the Rev. Cartwright, confirms that he has known Maria since her early childhood and conveys "... great pleasure in recommending [her] to His Excellency, [for his] most favourable consideration ..."

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, K.V., 2008. Colebee. *The Dictionary of Sydney*. <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/colebee> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>64</sup> Stannard, P., 2019. *Maria Lock's 1831 petition*. Sydney Living Museums. <https://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au/stories/maria-locks-1831-petition> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>65</sup> Button, J., October 2021. Blacktown – An Australian Frontier. How multicultural life on the urban edge provides a new look at our country. Scanlon Foundation Research Institute. *Narrative*, 7, 105.

<sup>66</sup> State Archives of New South Wales, 1831. *The Petition of Maria Lock, an Aboriginal Native of New South Wales*. NRS 907 [2/7908] 31/1853; <https://ininet.org/a-note-on-structure.html?page=30> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>67</sup> Stannard, 2019. *Op. cit.*





Although Maria's petition was not immediately honoured, Robert—now an 'emancipist',<sup>68</sup> a free man—eventually received a response from the Colonial Secretary, Alexander McLeay (1767–1848), care of the Rev. Cartwright. It contained an offer for a land grant of 30–40 acres "... as near to your present residence [in Blacktown] as suitable vacant land can be found ..."<sup>69</sup> However, Robert and Maria instead requested a 33½ acre (13.6 hectares) allotment that shared a boundary with the land of their "... best and only friend ...", the Rev. Cartwright, just south of Cabramatta Creek at Liverpool.

Surprisingly, perhaps, Cartwright did not respond favourably to their request. In fact, he successfully intervened. In a letter provided to the Colonial Secretary during a visit to the administrator's offices on 16 June 1831, he suggested that the Locks would be better off in Blacktown than in Liverpool:

*Sir,*

Understanding that Rob. Lock, married to a black woman, is about to receive an order to take possession of thirty acres of the Govt. Reserve Land adjoining my farm at Liverpool, which land applied for February 11th 1830, in lieu of the 100 acres at Richmond which request could not be complied with ... As the land in question was reserved for future extension of the Town of Liverpool. I beg leave to state for the information of His Excellency the Governor, that in complying with the wish of Rob<sup>l</sup>. Lock he will cut through my building and take from me about seven acres of land on which I have expended a considerable sum of money and otherwise be most ruinous to my establishment and injurious to the neighbourhood ... His wife being very desirous of removing to Black Town and of obtaining land there, and being convinced that Liverpool was an improper place for them — In rancour Lock himself on one occasion declaring to me that he would leave his wife and children for the Government to keep if he did not get the land promised to her at the time of marriage ...<sup>70,71</sup>

As a result, on 22 June 1831 the Colonial Secretary informed Robert Lock that the land grant at Liverpool previously awarded to him "... is reserved for Public purposes ...",<sup>72</sup> and so the offer was rescinded. Robert would need to make a new selection of a block of land, within four months. McLeay also commented that he felt "... commanded to add that if there be vacant Land at Blacktown you will be required to take it there." The Colonial Secretary followed up by directing Robert to take his "... Allotment of Land ordered for you as near to that of your wife's brother Colebe [sic] at Black-town."<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, Maria persisted in her efforts. In July 1832, she once again filed a petition to obtain the land grant she had been promised back in 1824—now addressed to the newly appointed Governor Richard Bourke (1777–1855), who had been in post since December 1831. Her petition was cleverly phrased. It referred to promises made by previous governors, a common approach used by settlers to gain an advantage:

<sup>68</sup> Emancipists were former convicts who had served out their sentence or had been pardoned and were "... of good conduct and disposition to industry ..." Each male was entitled to 30 acres, an additional 20 acres if married and 10 acres for each child with him in the settlement at the time of the grant (*Historical Records of Australia*, 1.1.14).

<sup>69</sup> Brook, 2008. *Op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Cartwright, R., 1831. *Colonial Secretary's letters relating to Land, 1826–56. Cartwright to McLeay.* State Archives of New South Wales. Item 2/7908, reel 1153.

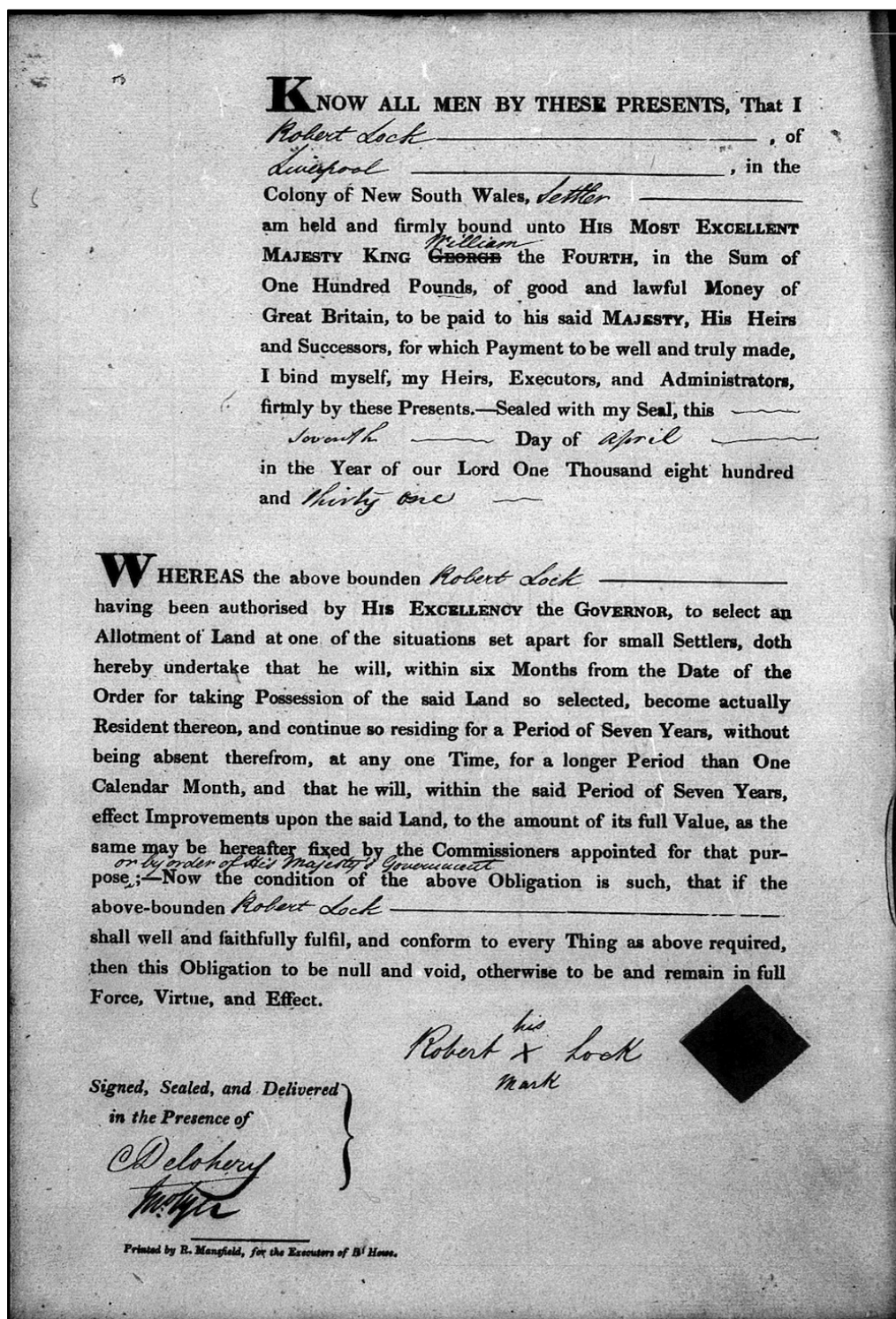
<sup>71</sup> Watson, J., 1994. *Maria Lock – A remarkable woman.* The Living Floor Project. Western Sydney Libraries. <http://www.westernsydneylibraries.nsw.gov.au/westernsydney/maria.html> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>72</sup> Three weeks later, the surveyor-general, Thomas Mitchell, wrote that the land "... is vacant and not required for any public purposes ...", but he was overruled in a foul political stoush; Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.* Pp. 255–256.

<sup>73</sup> NSW Colonial Secretary, 1831. *Colonial Secretary copies of letters sent re: Land.* State Archives of New South Wales. Reel 2301. P. 174.



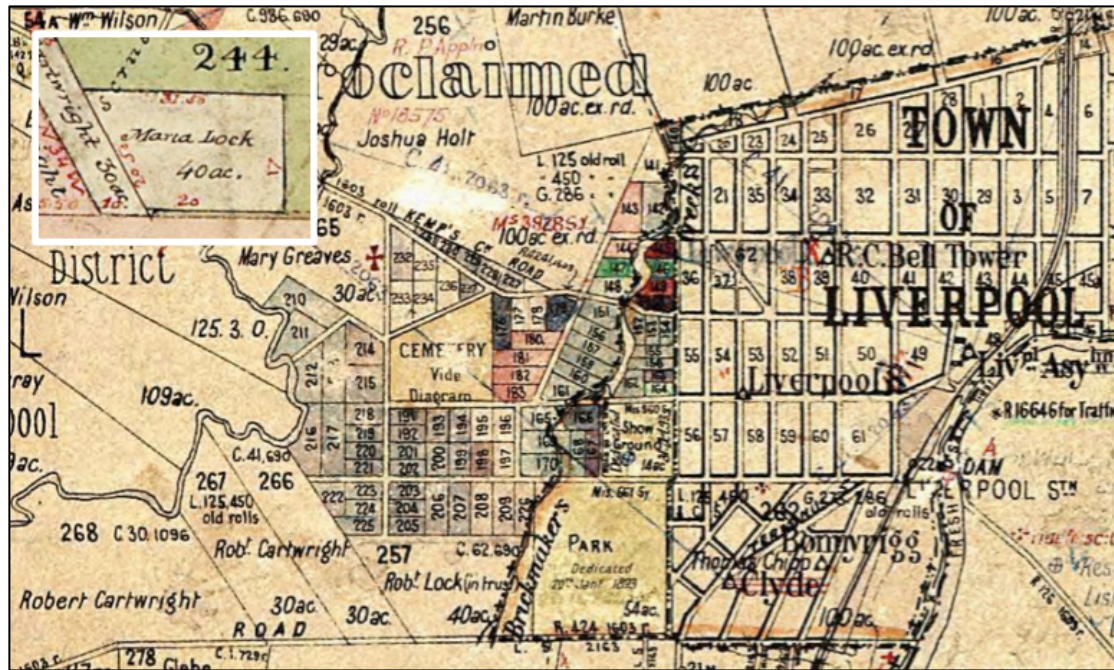
Her Husband and three young children beg most humbly to solicit your Excellency will be pleased to take her case under your benign consideration and be pleased to Grant her the indulgence as promised by his Late Excellency, which act of kindness should your Excellency be pleased to bestow, Your Petitioner would be as in Duty ever bound to pray.<sup>74</sup>



Robert Lock's first land grant, dated 7 April 1831. Note his mark of agreement in the form of a cross instead of a formal signature. (Colonial Secretary's letters relating to land, 1826–56. Item 2/7908, reel 1153. State Archives of New South Wales. CC BY 4.0.)

<sup>74</sup> NSW Colonial Secretary, 1832. Colonial Secretary's letters relating to Land, 1826–56. 19/7/1832. State Archives of New South Wales. Item 2/7908, reel 1153.





Robert Lock's 40 acre land grant in Liverpool (at the bottom of the map; parcel 257), held 'in trust' for Maria, shown on an 1893 map of St Luke's parish. *Inset*: Contemporary parish maps alternately identified the land grant as belonging to Robert, held in trust, or Maria Lock. (New South Wales Land Registry Services. CC BY 4.0.)

This time her persistence paid off. On 22 October 1832, Robert was advised that he would be allowed to take possession of 40 acres of land at Liverpool, located along the Georges River and extending to the current Council Chambers. It was officially granted on 27 February 1833,

... in Trust for the said Maria Lock during her life for the sole and separate use without the control of her present or future husband she may have and remain in trust for the Heirs of the said Maria Lock by you her present husband the said Robert Lock begotten.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, Maria had to "... reside in person on the Land or employ in the immediate charge of it, as her Agent, or Manager, a free man of approved Character and Respectability ...",<sup>76</sup> a remarkable achievement for an Aboriginal woman at the time.

Despite his convict history, and presumably mindful of the lessons learnt from his conviction, Robert briefly ended up on the wrong side of the law once again. On 10 April 1832, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* reported that, at the Parramatta Quarter Sessions Court,

Robert Lock was indicted for assaulting John Burkenshaw, at Liverpool. The defendant was found guilty, but the case being slight, he was sentenced to pay a fine of one shilling.<sup>77</sup>

No further negative consequences resulted.

Meanwhile, as a free settler, Robert was entitled to government assistance in the form of convict labour. A newspaper clipping from 1834 provides a peek into his otherwise presumably unremarkable life as a subsistence farmer:

<sup>75</sup> Watson, 1994. *Op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup> Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.* Pp. 256–257.

<sup>77</sup> *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, 10 April 1832. Parramatta Quarter Sessions. P. 3.

The chief officer of the ship *Juno*, and a seaman, named Welsh, also belonging to that ship, were committed on Monday last for trial, on a charge of aiding and assisting two prisoners of the Crown, ... and Thomas Wheeler, *a runaway from the service of Mr. Robert Lock*, of Paramatta [sic], to escape from the Colony.<sup>78</sup> (my emphasis).

Robert, Maria and their growing family lived on the Liverpool grant for 11 years from the time of the award in 1833. The Colonial Secretary's Office eventually published the official land grant allocations on 15 April 1840.<sup>79,80</sup>

Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney, 15th April, 1840.

#### GRANTS OF LAND.

THE following descriptions of GRANTS OF LAND, with the names of the persons to whom the were originally promised, or by whom they are now claimed, are published for general information, in order that all parties concerned may have an opportunity of correcting any errors or omissions that may have been made inadvertently. It is requested that within three months from the present date, the particulars required by the Government Notice of the 1st October 1838, may be accurately furnished to this Office, viz:— Surname and all Christian names of the person in whose favor the Deed is to be prepared, written at full length, his residence and the intended name of the property. Also (if required in any name but that of the original Promisee), the grounds of the claim, and a letter from the said Promisee, if living, and from all intermediate Assigns, if any, giving his and their consent and sanction thereto, and witnessed either by a Magistrate or a Solicitor of the Supreme Court. If these be duly furnished and satisfactory and if no Caveat be lodged or other cause of uncertainty appear, the Deeds will be prepared accordingly, as soon as possible after the expiration of the stated period of three months. If the required particulars be not furnished within that period, or if a Caveat be lodged, or other cause of uncertainty arise, which cannot be satisfactorily determined by the Government, the case will be referred to the Commissioners of Claims, and the parties subjected to the expense of that proceeding.

...  
CUMBERLAND.  
...

47. ROBERT LOCK, in trust for his wife MARIA LOCK, an aboriginal native and their children, 40, Forty acres, parish of Saint Luke; commencing at the south-east corner of Cartwright's second grant of 30 acres; bounded on the south by a line bearing east 20 chains; on the east by a line north 17 chains; on the north by a line west 31 chains 50 links; and on the west by a line south 34 degrees; east 20 chains 50 links.

Promised by Sir Ralph Darling on 31st July, 1831; and possession given on 27th February, 1833, as a primary grant.

Quit-rent 6s. 8d. sterling per annum, commencing 1st January, 1840.

#### ***The first successful native title claim***

Despite her success in securing land grants from the colonial government, Maria was resolute about acquiring the Blacktown land grant along Richmond Road that had originally been awarded to Colebee and Nurragingy. On 11 December 1842, Maria filed yet another petition. Her persistence and skills in navigating the white man's law of land possession finally paid off in 1843, when she was granted her brother Colebee's land in her own name. Since Colebee's grant had originally been awarded for "... His Heirs and Assignes to Have and to Hold for Ever ...", the land claim was legally Maria's, irrespective of competing claims by the descendants of Nurragingy.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>78</sup> *The Sydney Herald*, 18 December 1834. Accidents, offences, &c. P. 3.

<sup>79</sup> *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 15 April 1840. Grants of Land. P. 370.

<sup>80</sup> The title deeds were published in the *New South Wales Government Gazette* of 18 November 1840 (Pp. 1221–1224).

<sup>81</sup> Brook and Kohen, 1991. *Op. cit.* P. 257.



This represented yet another, relatively poorly known but ultimately highly significant colonial 'first'—the first native title claim in Australian history.

The Lock family returned to the 'Black Town' in 1844, where they soon acquired an additional 30 acres adjacent to Colebee's original grant.<sup>82, 83</sup> That particular block of land had originally been granted by Governor Macquarie to Sylvanus Williams<sup>84</sup> (born 1787), a former convict turned handyman. It was bought by the Native Institution Committee in 1822. The Locks continued working their gradually increasing land grants with their menagerie of cows, horses and plough.

Robert eventually died in Blacktown on 23 August 1854, aged 54. He was buried in St. Bartholomew's Church of England in Prospect two days later. Maria survived him by 24 years, until her own death in Windsor, on 6 June 1878, aged in her seventies. Maria's parish burial registration, No. 249, reads "Last of the Aborigines from Blacktown". Maria and Robert are buried next to each other in unmarked graves in St. Bartholomew's churchyard. A memorial plaque was unveiled on 22 September 2019, which has since been installed in the churchyard behind the Church.<sup>85</sup>



**St. Bartholomew's Church of England and cemetery, Prospect.**  
(Blacktown City Libraries. CC BY-SA-NC 3.0 NZ.)

By the time of Maria's death, she had acquired land grants of 60 acres at Blacktown and 40 acres at Liverpool, corresponding to a total land area of some 400,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Following her death and according to her will, her property was divided equally among her four surviving daughters—Eliza Parsons, Martha Stunnings, Mary Ann Ward and Clara Smith—and five sons, Robert, James, John, William and Charles. The executor of her will, Robert Crawford (1827–1906), major landholder at

<sup>82</sup> Parry, N., 2005. *Lock, Maria (1805–1878)*. Australian Dictionary of Biography. National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lock-maria-13050/text23599> [accessed 15 April 2022].

<sup>83</sup> Sharpe, A., 2000. *Blacktown and District. Pictorial History*. Sydney: Kingsclear Books Pty Ltd. P. 6.

<sup>84</sup> Registrar-General's Department of Land Grants Book, No. 613.

<sup>85</sup> *The National Tribune*, 24 September 2019. Memorial unveiled to pioneering Aboriginal woman Maria Lock. <https://www.nationaltribune.com.au/memorial-unveiled-to-pioneering-aboriginal-woman-maria-lock/> [accessed 15 April 2022].



Doonside, divided the Blacktown grant into parcels of 8 acres (3.2 hectares) each. The Liverpool grant was split into blocks of just over 4 acres each.<sup>86</sup>

The descendants of Maria and Robert's nine surviving children, numbering in the thousands today,<sup>87</sup> continued to live on the Lock land grants until 1917. Around 1920, Maria's freehold Blacktown land grants were taken away from the extended family by the Aborigines Protection Board to form the Plumpton (Rooty Hill) Aboriginal reserve, although some of the Native Institution site remained contested.<sup>88</sup>

(left) Maria Lock Memorial, Prospect. Note the incorrect reference to Yarramundi. (Author supplied.)

## Maria Lock(e)

(c. 1808-1878)

One of the first Aboriginal women to be granted land.






The letter dated 14 March 1823, was written by Maria Lock(e) in part of her bid to obtain her promised land and sent to then Governor Lieutenant General Darling.

This marker acknowledges Maria Lock(e), born to Yarramundi, an elder of the Darug tribe's Boorooberongal clan from the Richmond area. This was a time when European diseases and conflicts with soldiers and settlers were resulting in the deaths of many Aboriginal people. The resulting breakdown of Aboriginal social structure, the introduction of European vices and the loss of hunting and gathering grounds to new farms were having dire consequences on the survival of the Aboriginal people's traditional ways.

In light of this, in 1814 Governor Macquarie sanctioned the establishment of the Parramatta Native Institution. Macquarie's aim was that the Aboriginal population could be assimilated into the Colony's ranks as domestic servants, farmhands and labourers. This experiment removed Aboriginal children from their traditional influences and attempted to 'civilise' and 'Christianise' them. Graduates were promised parcels of land when they were married, as part of Macquarie's vision that they would form small farming communities.

Maria was among the small inaugural enrolment of young Aboriginal children sent to the care of the Native Institution. Records show that Maria was academically gifted - she came first ahead of more than 100 students in an all-comers exam in 1819.

Around 1823, Maria was married to Dickey, the son of Bennelong from the Wangal clan of Balmain, but he died soon after. In 1824, at the age of 16, she was married to convict carpenter Robert Lock(e) St John's Church, Parramatta, becoming the first Aboriginal woman to officially wed a European man. Being a convict, Robert was 'assigned' to his new wife, putting Maria in the interesting position of being able to return her husband to the Government should he not meet her expectations.

With the commencement of her marriage Maria was promised a cow and a small grant of land. The land grant was not forthcoming for many years and only came about after a determined campaign by Maria to successive governors, requesting that the promises made to her be fulfilled. A key participant in her battle was influential patron and prospective neighbour, the Rev. Robert Cartwright, who wanted the same block of land that Maria and Robert had initially chosen.

In 1833, Maria's tenacity and resolve were rewarded when she took possession of her promised land in the form of a parcel of 40 acres to the North, East and West of this location. Robert and Maria Lock(e) had 10 children together. Maria died in 1878 and was buried at St Bartholomew's cemetery at Prospect.

Today, Maria's land has been largely developed for housing. The Liverpool-Parramatta T-way (LPT) stand on the Eastern section of her land grant.

This project was proudly funded by the Stronger Communities Program.  
Images Courtesy of State Records NSW and the NSW Department of Lands.



Maria Lock(e) memorial, Liverpool. (Author supplied.)

<sup>86</sup> Registrar-General's Department of Land Grants Book, 291, No. 614. Note that the Blacktown grant hence covered almost 75 acres (30.4 hectares), while only 60 acres (24.3 hectares) were available based on the original grants.

<sup>87</sup> One estimate has reported some 7000 descendants, many of whom still have links with Greater Western Sydney; Ihlein, L., 2014. *A field trip to Yobarnie*. The Yeomans Project. <https://yeomansproject.com/field-trip-to-yobarnie/> [accessed 15 April 2022]. See also Ford, 2010. *Op. cit.* P. 74 and Chapter 4.

<sup>88</sup> Ihlein, 2014. *Op. cit.*

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The story of Maria and Robert Lock is truly remarkable. Although they came from radically different cultural back-grounds, the couple worked hard to make their union work, and they remained committed to their marriage. Under Maria's ambitious leadership and driven by her initiative, her sense of fairness and her desire for equity, they achieved a number of remarkable 'firsts'—departures from the prevailing social conventions—including:

- The first interracial marriage, between a white British convict and an Aboriginal woman;
- A convict man was placed under the supervision and in the care of a woman, who would have been entitled to 'return' him to the government if she was dissatisfied with his performance;
- A white man was assigned to an Aboriginal woman for the remainder of his sentence;
- A woman was awarded a land grant in her own name (strictly speaking not a 'first' but an infrequent occurrence);
- An Aboriginal woman was allowed to possess property in her own name and acquire property from a deceased relative in the first native title claim in Australian colonial history.

By all accounts, Maria Lock was a true trailblazer. The inspirational story of Maria and Robert Lock offers hope for our shared future in modern-day Australia based on equity, mutual respect and understanding.